

## MLA IN-TEXT CITATIONS

MLA in-text citations are made with a combination of signal phrases and parenthetical references. A **signal phrase** indicates that something taken from a source (a quotation, summary, paraphrase, or fact) is about to be used; usually the signal phrase **includes the author's name**. The **parenthetical reference**, which comes after the cited material, normally **includes at least a page number (or paragraph number)**.

### *IN-TEXT CITATION*

One reviewer, Roger Ebert, says that after seeing the movie, he was going to have his eyes glued shut (par. 3).

Readers can look up the author's last name in the alphabetized list of works cited, where they will learn the work's title and other publication information.

The MLA system of in-text citations, which depends heavily on authors' names and page (or paragraph) numbers, was created in the early 1980s with print sources in mind. Because some of today's electronic sources have unclear authorship and lack page numbers, they present a special challenge. Nevertheless, the basic rules are the same for both print and electronic sources.

The models in this section (items 1–3) show how the MLA system usually works and explain what to do if your source has no author or page (or paragraph) numbers.

#### 1. AUTHOR NAMED IN A SIGNAL PHRASE

Ordinarily, introduce the material being cited with a **signal phrase that includes the author's name**. In addition to preparing readers for the source, the signal phrase allows you to keep the parenthetical citation brief.

Christine Haughney reports that the plot of the novel is boring, long, and unbelievably shallow (par. 1).

The signal phrase — *Christine Haughney reports that* — names the author; the parenthetical citation gives the paragraph number where the paraphrase may be found.

Notice that the period follows the parenthetical citation.

#### 2. AUTHOR NAMED IN PARENTHESES

If a signal phrase does not name the author, put the author's last name in parentheses along with the page number.

Most movie viewers will find this action exciting and worth the price of admission. They will simply be overwhelmed by the visual effects (Ebert, par. 2).

Use no punctuation between the name and a page number, but if you have paragraph numbers, then use a comma and the abbreviation for paragraph (par.) to separate the author from the number.

### 3. AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Either use the complete title in a signal phrase or use a short form of the title in parentheses. Titles of websites are underlined; titles of articles are put in quotation marks.

The movie is a spectacle. The acting is great, and the plot is believable (Kirkus Reviews, par. 2).

OR

According to Kirkus Reviews, the movie is a spectacle. The acting is great, and the plot is believable (par. 2).

When to use direct quotations: probably never. However, a general guideline for quotation usage suggests that only 5-10 percent of a paper may be quoted. Remember, for you to include a quotation, the author has to have said something so well that you can not possibly paraphrase it without losing the point of the author's words. THIS IS VERY RARE.

TIP: Before assuming that a Web source has no author, do some detective work. Often the author's name is available but is not easy to find. For example, it may appear at the end of the source, in tiny print. Or it may appear on another page of the site, such as the home page.